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Mr. Paul Condino, Chair
House Judiciary Committee

Representative Condino and Members of the Judiciary Committee:
Thank you for the opportunity address the Committee today. I am Anita Salustro. I am from the Michigan office of AARP, and I am also here as a member of the Governor's Task Force on Elder Abuse.

The Task Force met in 2005 and 2006. Governor Granholm charged us with developing recommendations to protect vulnerable adults from financial exploitation. It followed that we needed to take a careful look at the guardianship system. The 17-member body deliberated about guardianships, conservatorships, and the plight of the vulnerable elderly. We listened to professional guardians, attorneys, and many advocates. We learned that a very thorough report was issued in 1998. Very few of those recommendations were implemented.

Our task force was persuaded to endorse reforms to the guardianship system. We were told that oftentimes guardians (both private and publicly appointed) are overwhelmed with their duties. Guardians take on conservatorship duties without even knowing it. Financial exploiters are in the guardian system, too. You are familiar with the example of the paid guardian from Eaton County who stole thousands of dollars - money that was not restored.

The Task Force voted unanimously to establish better prevention tactics for protected persons. We were convinced of the need for more court oversight and more public accountability of the funds entrusted to guardians.

The bills in front of this committee line up with our task force recommendations. As you know, they call for bonding, conservatorships

if accounts exceed the threshold, and controls on mortgages and liens for those protected persons.

I mentioned that I am also on staff at AARP. I have shared these bills with the national staff experts on guardianships and they endorse them heartily. I speak both as a staff member of AARP and as a former member of the Governor's Task Force on Elder Abuse in support of the bills.

Anita Salustro
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